

The National Marine Protected Areas Initiative

National Inventory of Marine Managed Areas for the United States of America



This is the first such inventory. Presently, the United States does not necessarily know how many sites exist or what each site protects.

Why is an Inventory Needed?

Presidential Executive Order 13158 included requirements to develop a national system of marine protected areas (MPAs) and publish a list of MPAs. The National MPA Center has been charged with these tasks, and has been publishing completed data on www.mpa.gov.

Initial development was focused specifically on quickly meeting the listing requirement of the Executive Order. However, the data collection team soon recognized the complexity of collecting, analyzing, and classifying information about sites designated and managed by agency programs at the federal level, by the 35 coastal states, territories, and commonwealths, as well as by tribes and local governments. As a result, the initial phase of the listing task is the development of a national inventory of marine managed areas (MMAs) from which the list of MPAs will be selected. The

MMA inventory will be used to generate the MPA list, conduct the scientific analyses needed to define and support the national system of MPAs, also Executive Order requirements, and determine which existing sites effectively meet the goals of the national system.

The national inventory also provides useful data to local, state and federal managers, scientists, conservation organizations, industry and user groups, other stakeholders, the media, and international organizations concerned with regional and global conservation.

What's the Difference Between a Marine Managed Area and a Marine Protected Area?

A marine protected area refers to any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources within them. Marine protected area is a broad, inclusive term which includes both multi-purpose sites with some restrictions as well as the more restrictive "no take marine reserves." The term marine managed area encompasses a broader spectrum of management purposes, including protection of geological, cultural, or recreational resources that may not meet all the MPA criteria or have a conservation purpose.

About the Inventory

To date, most of the federal inventories have been finalized and are available on mpa.gov. Efforts are underway to gather data on state, territorial, and commonwealth MMAs. The inventory team, comprised of NOAA and other federal and state staff, has met with many state officials to introduce them to the data collection process. The team has plans for initial involvement with other coastal state officials that have not yet participated. The inventory team expects to complete initial state data collection by late 2003.

Discussions with tribal officials regarding participation in the MPA initiative and collection of information about tribal MMAs are ongoing.

Categories in the MMA database are grouped into five areas: structural, legal, location/size, management, and information sources. These include information on site description, legal protection, threats, and the purposes and restrictions of management zones. Public comment is being sought on the proposed data fields, definitions, and database structure.

What are the Benefits of the Inventory?

The inventory database, available on mpa.gov, has four main benefits:

1. It increases information exchange.
2. It aids in natural and cultural resource management decisions.
3. It provides strong analytical assistance to resource managers, stakeholders, and academia.
4. It assists the National MPA Center in complying with Executive Order 13158.

In addition, the inventory provides a consistent, accessible and searchable information base about the nation's reserves. It promotes a better understanding of the distribution, condition, and effectiveness of existing MPAs, and raises awareness of MPA sites at a local, regional, and national level.

Regional maps that display GIS boundaries for each site in the inventory are available online for many sites.



Photo by K. Holland

Projected Data Collection Timeline

Visit mpa.gov to see the current status of the inventory.

Federal sites: Complete information by January 2004

State sites: Complete draft of information by January 2004

Tribal sites: Complete draft of information by January 2004

List of MPAs: Complete by end of 2004

For additional information, visit www.mpa.gov, or contact:

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